**November 15, 2020 Joshua 3:7-17**

***A Bridge***

**Scripture:** Joshua 3:7-17 NRSV

*(7)The LORD said to Joshua, "This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so that they may know that I will be with you as I was with Moses. (8)You are the one who shall command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, 'When you come to the edge of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.'" (9)Joshua then said to the Israelites, "Draw near and hear the words of the LORD your God." (10)Joshua said, "By this you shall know that among you is the living God who without fail will drive out from before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites: (11)the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is going to pass before you into the Jordan. (12)So now select twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. (13)When the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan flowing from above shall be cut off; they shall stand in a single heap." (14)When the people set out from their tents to cross over the Jordan, the priests bearing the ark of the covenant were in front of the people. (15)Now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest. So when those who bore the ark had come to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the edge of the water, (16)the waters flowing from above stood still, rising up in a single heap far off at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, while those flowing toward the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea, were wholly cut off. Then the people crossed over opposite Jericho. (17)While all Israel were crossing over on dry ground, the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, until the entire nation finished crossing over the Jordan.*

**Notes:**

1. The Hebrews are on the cusp of ***receiving*** their Promised Land
   1. Joshua was one of two living ***eyewitnesses*** of the Exodus.
   2. ***Faith*** and ***obedience*** to God brought victory,
2. The Israelites were ***eager*** to enter the Promised Land.
   1. Could Joshua build a ***bridge*** over troubled waters?
   2. God chose the time to demonstrate his ***power***.
3. God parted the Jordan River to let them ***enter*** Canaan.
   1. Does it matter how the Lord ***accomplished*** his goal?
   2. God keeps his ***promises***.
   3. Crossing the Jordan is a story of trust, faith and ***patience***.
4. Our ***nation*** has experienced many troubled waters lately.
   1. Hurricanes, protests, lost trust, and this ***virus***.
   2. God wants us to listen and to ***trust*** our leaders.
   3. ***Stand*** ***still*** in the waters
5. What are the ***rivers***, or obstacles, in your life?
   1. In obedience to God, take that first ***step***.
   2. Crossing troubled waters requires trust, patience, and ***faith***.
   3. God is our ***bridge*** over troubled waters.

**Script:**

It always amazes me how a song can get into my head and dwell there. This week is no different, as I began to look at scripture a song popped into my head and it has been there ever since. I believe I remember hearing it for the first time in 1973, But I could have heard it as early as 1970, its call “A Bridge Over Troubled Waters” written by Paul Simon. This song has lifted me when I was down, and turned my attention from my troubles.

One memory that always pops into my mind when I hear this is a memory from my childhood. There was a lot of rain and I remember being at our home in Lovely, watching as the water slapping the bottom of the bridge, that was our only way to cross the stream. When I hear this song, I think of that flood and how the bridge stayed in place. Providing us the means to leave our home and go to get what we needed. In a way that is what I see when I hear the song, my bridge over troubled waters.

We all have experienced troubled waters in our lives. Some may last for a short time and others may linger for quite some time. But how do we manage to get past these troubled times, where do we find refuge and how do we manage to find relief?

Today we find ourselves following the Hebrews, and they have seen some troubled waters; enslavement, being on the run from pharaoh, hunger, thirst, and even frustration. Along the way they have lost many who have started on this journey; Miriam dies in the wilderness near Kadesh; Aaron dies on Mount Hor. But perhaps the most devastating loss was that of their leader Moses. He travels up Mount Nebo to the very top of Pisgah. There God allows Moses to see the promised land, but because of his disobedience along the journey, he is not allowed to enter, and there he dies. That brings us to the passage we are looking at today, Joshua 3:7-17. Would you stand with me as we share in the reading of our sermon passage

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The Hebrews are on the cusp of receiving their Promised Land. Joshua succeeded Moses as Israel's leader. One may ask what qualifications did he have to become the leader of a nation? First, God appointed him. Next, he was one of only two living eyewitnesses to the Egyptian plagues as well as the Exodus from Egypt; Caleb was the other. Also, he was Moses' personal aide for the last 40 years. And of the 12 scouts sent into the promised land 39 years earlier, only he and Caleb showed complete confidence in God to help them conquer the land.

As the book of Joshua opens, the Israelites are camped along the east bank of the Jordan River. They are at the very edge of the Promised Land, and they are completing the mourning period for Moses death. Thirty-nine years earlier (after receiving God's law), the Israelites had an opportunity to enter the Promised Land, but they failed to trust God to give them victory. As a result, God did not allow them to enter the land, but made them wander in the wilderness until the disobedient generation had all died.

During their wilderness wanderings, the Israelites obeyed God's laws. They also taught the new generation to obey God's laws so that they might enter the Promised Land. As the children grew, they were often reminded that faith and obedience to God brought victory, while unbelief and disobedience brought tragedy. When the last of the older generation had died and the new generation had become adults, the Israelites prepared to make their long-awaited claim on the Promised Land.

God was giving the people rest. This was wonderful news to these people who had been on the move for their entire lives. The people who had no land would be given a land of their own, and they would be able to settle and to "rest." As we enter chapter 3 of Joshua, gives the instructions. To the people they are to follow the ark of the covenant after it passes in front of them. And to the priests, they are to take up the Ark and pass in front of the people.

Just before crossing over into the Promised Land, Joshua gathered the people to hear the words of the Lord. Their excitement was high. No doubt they wanted to rush on, but Joshua made them stop and listen. The Israelites were eager to enter the Promised Land, conquer nations, and live peacefully. But first they had to cross the flood-level waters of the Jordan River. God gave them specific instructions: In order to cross, the priests had to step into the water. What if these priests had been afraid to take that first step? Often God provides no solution to our problems until we trust him and move ahead with what we know we should do.

The Israelites crossed the Jordan River in the spring, when it was overflowing its banks. The Israelites found themselves in troubled waters when they approached the River Jordan. The Promised Land was on the other side. This was the last major obstacle that stood in their way of reaching their goal. Under the leadership of Moses, they had crossed the Red Sea. But now Moses was gone and Joshua was their new leader. Would he be up to the test? Could he build a bridge over troubled waters?

It was during the flood season after all. the waters of the river were abnormally high. God told Joshua to walk to the river’s edge and stand still. Instead of building a bridge, Joshua was instructed to select one man from each of the twelve tribes of Israel. They were to go ahead of the people and stand in the river. Then the priests, bearing the Ark of the Covenant would pass by. When their feet dipped in the water, the waters stopped flowing and a dry strip of land appeared, which enabled all the people to cross the river on dry ground. The priests remained in the middle of the river, holding the Ark of the Covenant until every person had safely crossed over. God chose the time when the river was at its highest to demonstrate his power, parting the waters so that the entire nation could cross on dry ground.

Does that sound familiar? God had parted the waters of the Red Sea to let the people out of Egypt, and here he parted the Jordan River to let them enter Canaan. Some say that God used a natural occurrence (such as a landslide) to stop the waters; others say he did it by a direct act. Does it really matter how the Lord accomplished his goal as long as his will was achieved? God showed his great power by working a miracle of timing and location to allow his people to cross the river on dry ground. This testimony of God's power served to build the Israelites' faith and hope in God and to give them a great reputation with their enemies, who greatly outnumbered them.

These miracles showed Israel that God keeps his promises. God's presence among his people and his faithfulness to them made the entire journey from Egypt to the Promised Land possible. He was with them at the end of their wanderings just as he was with them in the beginning.

The crossing of the Jordan is a story of trust, faith and patience. Joshua trusted that God would hold back the waters and make a bridge for his people. God trusted that Joshua would do as he was told. The people trusted in their leader, Joshua, to lead them to the other side of the river.

It seems that our nation has experienced many troubled waters lately as well. We have seen a very active hurricane season this year. We have seen the most hurricanes ever in a single season, and there are a few weeks left in the season; the gulf coast has been pounded one after the other since the season began, the loss of property and life is devastating. Then there are the protests and chaos surrounding the use of deadly force by law enforcement, these uprisings claim to be non-violent, but many times, they have turned deadly and destructive. We have allowed the actions of a few to turn us against each other. We have lost trust in our political leadership. We have become suspicious of systems that have worked well over the years. We have become suspicious of the motives of every person in leadership. And we do not trust the system to do the right thing. And then we have been dealing with a virus that has seemed to come from nowhere. A virus that is claiming victims daily, and the number keeps rising. To combat the virus, they are asking us to give up our freedom. Yet the there is no guarantee that surrendering freedoms will defeat the virus.These are just what we find on the surface.

God wants us to listen and to trust our leaders. Imagine if you were one of the Israelites, crossing the Jordan with water “heaped up” on either side of you. Would you venture forward, trusting that God would keep you dry? Do you trust the leaders in your life; your teachers, your parents, your pastor? The Lord told Joshua to “stand still in the waters” of the Jordan. Unlike Moses who raised his staff to part the waters of the Red Sea, Joshua was instructed to wait. When we are experiencing troubled waters, we often lose patience. Because we live in a society that wants everything now and expects everything to be done yesterday, we have become an impatient people.

Think of the priests, as they stood in the middle of the river. They stood there with the Ark of the Covenant as all the people passed by. They couldn’t leave their position, in spite of the fact that there was a wall of water on either side of them. They had to be patient, they had to wait.

What are the rivers, or obstacles, in your life? When we experience troubled waters, we get anxious. We want a quick fix. We want the pain, the suffering, the confusion to go away as soon as possible. We want to get to the other side immediately. We are more like Evel Knievel, wanting to blast across a river canyon rather than climb down the hillside and wade across where it is safe.

In obedience to God, take that first step. It is easy to get caught up in your tasks, becoming too busy for what God says is most important; listening to his words. Before making your schedule, take time to focus on what God wants from you; focus on what God wants from all your activities. Know that what God is saying to you before you rush into your day can help you avoid foolish mistakes.

Crossing troubled waters requires trust and patience. And it also requires faith. Faith in a God who assures us that He will be with us in our transition. Faith in a God who promises new life in a new land. Faith in a God who can create a bridge over troubled waters in ways that surpass our understanding. Faith in a God who is our bridge over troubled waters.

In the Ark of the Covenant was the Law of Moses. The Law of Moses was symbolic of the presence of God. The Israelites believed God was with them as they traveled the two-thirds of a mile between the waters of the river. For the Israelites, crossing the Jordan would not be the end of their challenges. Once across they would face opposition in the form of armed nations. They successfully crossed the bridge over troubled waters but their journey was not complete. What the event did for them was give them hope and remind them that whatever they faced in the future, God would be with them.

Whatever troubled waters you are facing, Trust in God, trust in the words that you hear from the Holy Spirit as you seek the Lord’s will for each new day. Walk by faith that no matter what obstacles you face. The Lord will provide you with a way to the other side.

The song Bridge Over Troubled Waters is rather unique; Paul Simon said that when he wrote this tune he did it in one night. He didn’t know where it came from, but it just seemed to flow from his guitar and pen. There were chords and chord progressions that he had never used before; and as he finished writing it he was amazed, he said it felt like a gift, this tiny little hymn.

I imagine this is how the prophets felt when they shared the prophecies of God, they just flowed from their lips, they were divine phrases from God to His people and they have stood the test of time. Today in closing I would like to read you the lyrics of this song. And I would like you to listen closely imagining that these are the words of God to you. I am only going to read the original first two verses, for the third was added to make it marketable in record sales.

***Bridge Over Troubled Waters*** by Paul Simon

When you're weary, feeling small.   
When tears are in your eyes, I'll dry them all (all)  
I'm on your side, oh, when times get rough  
And friends just can't be found  
Like a bridge over troubled water, I will lay me down  
Like a bridge over troubled water, I will lay me down

When you're down and out, When you're on the street  
When evening falls so hard, I will comfort you (ooo)  
I'll take your part, oh, when darkness comes  
And pain is all around  
Like a bridge over troubled water, I will lay me down  
Like a bridge over troubled water, I will lay me down

Today, know that the Lord is with you, walking through whatever troubled waters you are encountering. Trust in Him, have faith in Him, follow Him and His will.